

House Republican Press Release

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Rep. Harkins, Area Legislators Discuss Education Funding Issues



State Representative John Harkins, R-Stratford, said today's regional legislative caucus meeting hosted by the Bridgeport Regional Business Council was productive and will help local legislators address Stratford's education needs during the upcoming legislative session. Representing Stratford in addition to Rep. Harkins were State Senator George 'Doc' Gunther, R-Stratford, Senator

Edwin Gomes, D-Bridgeport, and Rep. Larry Miller, R-Stratford. Mayors and area First Selectman also attended the event. In all, 13 area legislators attended the meeting, which addressed topics such as education funding, magnet schools, public health, child services, disparity in services delivered by the state Department of Children and Families (DCF), economic development, and transportation.

"The challenge of funding local education is not unique to the town of Stratford," said Rep. Harkins, who serves as an Assistant Minority Leader. "Creating unfunded mandates that force towns to participate in a magnet school program they cannot afford is simply wrong. Last year, Stratford officials made a very difficult decision to close Center Elementary School to reduce operating expenses. Even as this was being done, legislators from Bridgeport were working to mandate Stratford's participation in the Six to Six Magnet School, whose costs our town struggled to cover."

Rep. Harkins noted he has gained support from legislative colleagues from Bridgeport to help ensure Stratford is not unfairly forced into a similar position in the future. He is currently working to arrange a meeting with Rep. Felipe Reinoso, D-Bridgeport, and members of the Legislature's Education Committee to address the issue of inequity and disparity of education funding and unfunded state mandates that impact the Stratford and the Bridgeport area.

The Bridgeport Regional Business Council is a business membership association. It is comprised of the company officials that represent diverse business interests throughout the greater Bridgeport region. Its mission is to increase opportunities for the people in the region by acting to create an environment for business expansion, retention, and recruitment that will result in jobs and tax base growth.

"Today's meeting was an excellent forum for discussing these issues and what needs to be done," said Rep. Harkins. "Since making adjustments to the 2006-07 state budget will

be a main focus of the legislative session that begins in a few weeks, we must ensure Stratford's needs are addressed in those revisions.”